

In Short

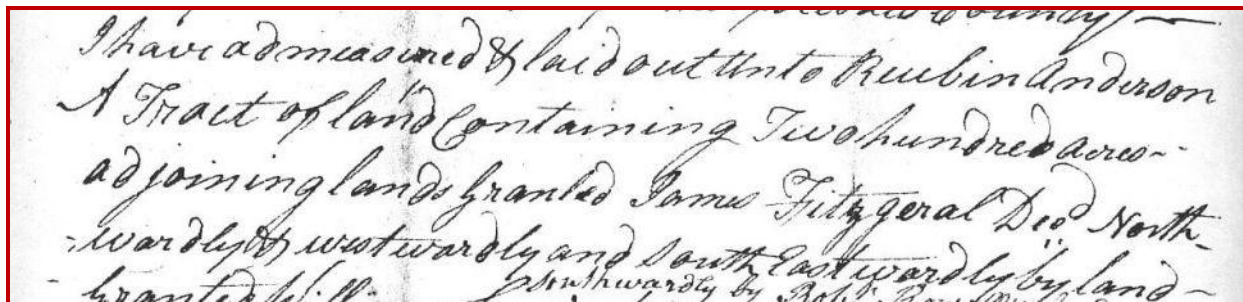
Interesting odds and ends about our ancestors

James Fitzgerald in St. George Parish, Georgia

Our earliest known Fitzgerald ancestor was James, who petitioned for headright land in St. George Parish (now Burke County) no later than early May 1769. Unfortunately, due to a gap in extant records, this first petition has not survived since in it, he would not only have identified the make-up of his family and how long he had been in the province but likely whence he came and maybe even the ship that brought him if he was recently arrived to these shores.

He was granted 200 acres of land on Duke's Pond so he had a wife and at least one child by then (100 acres for himself, 50 acres for each of them). This tract was located in a part of Burke that was carved out to create Jenkins County in 1905. In December 1770 James petitioned for another 100 acres, stating that he had been granted 200 acres previously and had a wife and three children, two of them likely born since the first petition though he didn't have to take out all the land for which he qualified at one time.

Little is known about the life of these early Fitzgeralds as Burke is a burned county so there are no surviving marriage, land, tax or court records for this period. We do know that James died prior to 1785, when "James Fitzgerald Decd" was named as an adjoining landowner on a survey:

A snippet of a handwritten survey document, likely from a survey of Reuben Anderson's land in Burke County, Georgia. The text is written in cursive and describes a tract of land containing two hundred acres, adjoining lands granted to James Fitzgerald Decd. The text is framed by a red border.

I have admeasured & laid out unto Reuben Anderson
A Tract of land containing Two hundred acres
adjoining lands granted James Fitzgerald Decd North-
wardly, westwardly and South Eastwardly by land
granted W. R.

James Fitzgerald Decd on Reuben Anderson's Burke County survey, 4 April 1785

The Fitzgerald name suggests that they were from Ireland, but if so they were likely to have been Protestants from *Northern* Ireland as Catholics were prohibited in Colonial Georgia. And as it happens, there was a migration of these "Scots-Irish" into St. George Parish beginning in 1768 at the inducement of the colonial government.

John Rea was a successful merchant who had come to the colonies from Belfast, Ireland. In a letter back home in early 1768 that his brother Matthew had published in the Belfast newspaper, John informed him that 50,000 acres of land had been reserved for Protestant families wishing to migrate to the colony, that their ship's passage would be paid and that they would be exempt from paying Quit Rents for 10 years on the land they were to be granted. The large tract of land reserved for them was referred to as the Irish Settlement but eventually named Queensborough Township.

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The first shipload of immigrants from Belfast arrived in early December 1768 aboard the *Prince George*, the earliest known ship to sail between Northern Ireland and Savannah despite Savannah being a well-established port city by then. The names of the passengers were not recorded (pre-1820 passenger lists and immigration records are generally non-existent) but the Governor reported to his Council that there were 107 passengers in all. By some estimates, six shiploads brought a total of 700 immigrants to St. George Parish between 1768 and 1774.

Christian Fitzgerald is believed to have been the wife of James, given her appearance in the headright grant records for early Burke County. Copies of all land warrants and the resulting surveys were sent to the state Surveyor-General, which is why these records survive for burned counties. By 1785, heads of family were entitled to 200 acres in their own right and 50 acres for each dependent, and that year Christian had 300 acres surveyed. In 1792, James Fitzgerald (Jr.) secured a 100-acre grant adjoining Christian. It isn't known when Christian died but she is last found as an adjoining landowner on a 1796 survey.



Bark Camp Baptist Church
in Burke County, about 1900

Christian was a charter member of this church, established in 1788, and her granddaughter Sarah Fitzgerald (our 3rd-great-grandmother) was a member there.

Sarah Fitzgerald's father was James and Christian's son John, who did not petition for any land but was an adjoining landowner on an 1813 survey. In about 1805 John married Rebecca Adams, the daughter of Noah and Orpha Adams, and in the 1820 land lottery he drew Lot 200 in the newly created Irwin County. Now in Wilcox County, this lot is where the courthouse stands. In 1828, Sarah married Nat Statham at her father's home in a ceremony performed by her maternal uncle, Miles Adams, J.P.

Sarah and Nat's daughter and youngest child was Sarah Jane Statham, who married Hezekiah "H.K." Anderson in Wilcox County in 1867. Their daughter Julia Ann Anderson married Noah Griffin Heath in 1887, and they were the parents of our grandmother Alma (Heath) Newman.

Compiled by Donna Newman, December 2020; for more information including sources, see "James Fitzgerald review, rev. June 2020"; "Migration from Northern Ireland into Colonial Georgia"; and Stathams in America (Merced, Ca.: by compiler, 2015), 127-135, by this compiler.